A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF HYPOTACTIC SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES IN WOLE SOYINKA'S *THE INTERPRETERS*

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the use of hypotactic syntactic structure in Wole Soyinka's The Interpreters. This novel has continued to receive critical attention over the years because of its dense linguistic structure. All literature exists in the form of language: either as spoken utterance or in writing. Language is, therefore, the most important element of fiction, since it gives existence to all the other fictional elements—theme, plot, setting and characterization. A study of language of a literary work is first of all a study of its style—an author's way of writing. Such a study involves, among other things, an examination of the syntax, diction, idioms, and imagery. Syntax refers to the structure of sentences. At the simplest level, it means the order or arrangement of words within a sentence, or the grammatical arrangement of words, phrases and clauses to give a sentence its structure. Sentences are randomly selected from the novel for the purpose of analyses. They are examined and analysed to ascertain the hypotactic structures which formed the bedrock of this study. The Lexical-Functional Grammar Theory of Bresnan (1971) is adopted for the analysis. The study finds out that Soyinka's syntactic structures in the novel are really complex. The study recommends that readers at all levels should arm themselves with good knowledge of linguistics to make meaning out of the novel.*

KEYWORDS: Stylistics, Hypotactic, Syntactic, Structure, Interpreters, Literary Style

INTRODUCTION

In examining syntax as a part of literary style, one considers several issues. For example, has the text employed sentences in which the normal order of words is reversed? Is there any reason for the inversion of word order? How frequent is the inversion? Are the sentences predominantly long or short? Are they simple, compound, multiple or complex? Ordinarily, an effective style is one in which there is variety in the syntax: the writer varies the length and structure of his sentences and sometimes reverses the grammatical order of words (Agu, 2008). As far as this researcher knows, no comprehensive linguistic analysis has been made on the novel. Adejare (1992) works on text linguistic analysis of words of the novel while Ofuani (2002) examines the cohesive devices employed by the author in writing the novel. Adejare uses what he called "A systemic analysis of idiolect". This by implication narrows the scope of the analysis to the peculiar way through which the author deploys words in the novel. Ofuani on his own part only examines the cohesive devices used in the novel, using the Halliday-Hassan approach. The present study differs from the aforementioned two in that it examines only the hypotactic syntactic structure in the novel using the Lexical Functional Grammar approach.

A simple review of literature reveals that language is central to the existence of literature. Hawkes (1977:15) puts it very succinctly when he opines that language is one genuinely

distinctive and permanent human characteristic discernible in 'poetic wisdom'. What this entails is that language manifests itself as the human capacity and necessity to generate myths, and to use words metaphorically and symbolically.

Man can thus be described as the animal that characteristically devises and invests in language. He does this in a complex system or structure of correspondences between distinct signs and distinct ideas or meanings to which those signs distinctively relate. But by its own very nature literature seems to offer language which is different from what may be loosely termed the 'normal' or 'everyday' usage of a speech community, yet which is intelligible to the members of that community if they are willing to apply a special standard of acceptability. This is the literary language, which has been chosen and manipulated by its user with the greater care and complexity than the average language user either can or wishes to exercise. If this distinctive use is recognized, it may be possible to discuss intelligently a writer's individual style (Chapman 1980).

Literature is an art expressed in words. It is created from the basic material of linguistic study and is allied to it in a way that other art forms like music and painting are not. In a restricted sense, literature has come to be identified particularly with artistic forms, verbal expression, especially fiction, drama, poetry, and kinds of prose that reveal an imaginative mind at work.

Defining literature may not be a very great problem. The real issue at stake is locating a point of equilibrium between linguistics as the scientific study of language and literature as an art form. This is not a very easy task, as it may seem superficially. Over the years, the place of linguistics in literary studies has generated heated debates. While some believe that the two fields are parallel to each other, others theorize that they have a definite point of intersection. Commenting on the review made by Vendler (1966), Fowler (1971:43) admits: 'Vender's voice is depressingly familiar to those of us who have suffered from an unnecessary schism between language and literature which has so long marred English studies'. This study is not very much interested in the details of the academic battle per se but in the resolutions thereof. Invariably the same Vendler (1966) seems to have paved the way for what might be termed the 'interim truce.' According to her, the primary justification for the use of the methods of linguistics in literary study is that any information about language is useful in studying an art form whose stuff is language. Consequently, '… if linguistics is defined as the study of language, then its contribution to literature or literary studies is unchallengeable.'

Hypotactic Sentence Structure – Ellipsis, Inversion and Subordination

One of the stylistic features of Soyinka's verbal structure is hypotactic sentence structure which is realized in the forms of ellipsis, inversion and subordination.

Ellipsis: The following sentences have some of its elements elided

a. *From the receding cannon a quizzical Crab emerged, seemed to stretch its claws in the sun and slipped over the edge, making a soft hole in the water.* (P 8)

b. *The boatman grounded his craft easily heaved a sack over his shoulder and receded into shadows* (p.10)

c. *And this waiting near the end of the journey, hesitating on the brink, wincing as he admitted it was it not exhumation of a better forgotten past?* (p. 11).

d.   *They ran her errand of tact, invented her whims took commissions for 'a good word to your sister' and drank from the overflow of eternal hope* (p. 56).

e.   *He had fought every step of the gangway, kicking, biting, clinging to the rails, and even in the cabin he had tried to open a porthole and the other passengers had laughed.* (P.55)

Each sentence above is a typical example of nominal ellipsis. Halliday and Hassan (1976:197) define nominal ellipsis as an ellipsis within the nominal group. In the first sentence a quizzical crab is the subject of the sentence. Out of the four Verbs- "emerged", "seemed to stretch", "slipped" and "making" only the limited verb "emerged" retained its subject. Others have theirs elided.

Sentence b has 'boatman' as the subject with three finite verbs- "grounded 'heaved' "and" 'receded'. The verb 'grounded' retained its subject, "boatman," while the other two verbs 'heaved' and "receded" have elided subjects.

Sentence **c** has a more complicated kind of elision. This complication arises from the fact that the subject of the sentence is not the usual noun or pronoun but a demonstrative, 'this', with strings of gerundive expressions each following the subject in an appositive manner: "waiting near the end…," 'hesitating on the brink', 'wincing as he admitted it". Thus the finite verb is kept till the end which appears in the form of a rhetorical question within the same sentence structure"

Soyinka achieves cohesion by the elision and the sentences owe their rhythmic qualities to the elision of the subjects in the subsequent clauses.

In the third sentence, for instance, the author makes use of a rhetoric question that points back to the main subject of the sentence. The question itself is structured in such a poetic manner that the answer is not necessary because the required answer has been provided in the first part of the sentence.

The consequence of this elliptical nature is that intra-sentence cohesion is achieved. A careful examination of the fourth sentence will lend credence to this assertion.

d.   *They ran her errands of tact invented her whims, took commissions for a good word to your sister and drank from the overflow of eternal hope.*

The whole of this sentence has one common subject, the pronoun 'they'. It controls a total of four finite verbs: "ran", "invented", "took" and drank". Without the ellipsis employed by the author the sentence would have read: "They ran... they invented… they took, and they… drank…". This would have made it monotonous, boring and repetitive.

Soyinka's use of ellipsis is not limited only to the use of one nominal group controlling a chain of finite verbs. He achieves a tacit poetic structure through a careful combination of finite and non-finite verbs in a single hypotactic sentence structure. The fifth sentence is a focal example of this:

> *"He had fought every step of the gang way, kicking, biting clinging to the rails, and even in the cabin he had tried to open a porthole and the other passengers had laughed".*

The full meaning of the sentence is realized in the first part of the sentence through the finite verb in the past tense: "He had fought every step of the gangway. "… But there are other activities performed by the same subject (represented in the sentence by the pronoun "He"). The other activities are represented by the verbs in –ing form signifying their progressive aspect while the main action was being completed "Kicking" biting' 'clinging'. Because of the complex nature of this sentence, the author has to repeat the subject in the last segment through a main clause depicting another action altogether "…and even in the cabin he had tried to open a porthole and the other passengers had laughed". The repetition of the subject in this clause is a mark of linguistic and stylistic competence on the part of the author, because if it had been elided completely, the structure would have been wobbling since an entirely new action was introduced through a finite verb.

Inversion and Subordination

Some of the sentences are inverted syntactically and subordinated. Here are a few examples:

1. *Dressed in his white dansiki he would be above suspicion in any company* (P 114)

2. *From the receding cannon a quizzical crab emerged (P.8)*

3. *squeezing into a sheath dress she wiggled like a trapped fish (P.61)*

4. *Once, in seatle, in the morning hours after a swinging binge, sagoe watched a slow-motion pebble flicked by the motor-car in front of his (P. 63)*

5. *In my last years in school I nearly didn't. (P. 123)*

Soyinka makes use of hypotactic sentence structure employing extreme inversion and subordination as shown in the sentences above. The sentences would be examined one after the other.

In the first sentence, the main clause of the sentence comes last "… he would be above suspicion in any company". This has the S + V + A structure. But the nominative position in the entire sentence is taken over by a dangling construction. It is an established grammatical fact (lrmscher 1981) that dangling constructions violate the fundamental grammatical principle, that adjectives should modify specific nominals. But when the danglers are used, they either modify nothing or modify the wrong word. In the present study, the author has employed the above dangler with a view to achieving humour which usually arises from the implied agent-action relation. Apart from the humour which is achieved, Soyinka uses inversion for emphatic purpose by fronting the part of the sentence he feels is very important to the meanings which the sentence connotes. This assertion could be noticed elaborately when sentence three is examined:

Squeezing into a sheath dress, she wiggled like a trapped fish.

Soyinka puts this dangling participle to good use. The word 'squeezing' connotes the idea of roughness and this naturally goes with a dress that is not properly ironed. This is further heightened by the idea of a trapped fish that is wiggling and searching for a way of escape probably from a net. The idea of a fish being trapped has already been emphasized by the first word 'squeezing'. In other words, the poet in Soyinka finds expression in his choice of sentence types which is made manifest in subordination and inversion as already seen here.

The second sentence begins with an adverbial phrase, suspending the main clause till the end. Ordinarily, the sentence could have read *Aquizzical crab emerged from the receding cannon.* This structure would maintain the simple sentence pattern of SVA subject, verb, adjunct). In the present case, the A-element takes the position of the subject thus resulting into inversion: ASVA

A quizzical crab emerged from the receding cannon

A similar construction is also seen in sentence 5 where the adjunct element begins the sentence. In this sentence there is a deliberate attempt by the author to elide the entire meaning and message of the conversation. Before now, Egbo and Simi have been talking about their religious beliefs. Egbo actually asks Simi whether she believes in God. In the course of the dialogue, Egbo states: 'some don't' (some do not believe in God). Then Egbo follows it up with the sentence: "In my last year in school, I nearly didn't". The emphasis here is on the time which is conveyed by the adverbial phrase. "*in my last year in school…*". It is fronted because the author's intention is on the time not on the issue of belief. This is further underlined by the fact that the main issue in the final clause which happens to carry the main message "belief" is elided. If the author has been much interested in the issue of belief, that verb would not have been elided. The sentence could have read "*I nearly did not believe in my last year in school*". But in the present circumstance, the phrase and not the main clause is fronted and the principal verb apart from coming towards the last part of the sentence is completely elided.

> What has been said above also applies to the fourth sentence *"Once in Seatle, in the morning hours after a swinging binge, Sagoe watched slow-motor-car in front of his"*.

At the nominative position stands a phrase, the A- element denoting time **"once"**. Within that phrase structure the author makes use of the adverb, **once** (adverb of time); "**in seatle**". (Adverb phrase of Place), **- in the morning hours** (adverb phrase of time); "**after a swinging binge**" (adverb phrase of time still). Thus taken as a whole, one will notice that the adverb phrase of time is fronted. This is the key emphasis which the author wants the reader to take note of before the main clause, which comes towards the end. '…**Sagoe watched a slow motion pebble flicked by the motor car in front of his'.**

The inverted sentence gives the novel a very condensed structure. This is achieved through the use of both nominal and verbal elision. The result is that the novel is saved from the sing-song pattern of many African Prose fictions. The inverted sentences give the author the opportunity to emphasize some key areas in the language of the narrative instead of placing undue stress on the message or theme of each sentence.

Hypotactic-Paratactic or Co-ordinate Sentence Structure

The grammar of parataxis as well as hypotaxis is the grammar of grammatical relations, applied to clauses. Whereas parataxis is a co-ordination of clauses, hypotaxis refers to a subordination of clauses. Fakuade (1998) posits that the paratactic sentence structure is of two kinds; they are syndetic and asyndeticparataxis. Since the use of the term "asyndesis" with reference to the text level is current in stylistics and rhetoric (Leman 2006), it will be pertinent to further offer more explanations on the concept before applying it to the syntactic analysis of Soyinka's *The Interpreters.*

The Greek word syndesis literally means 'binding together.' It refers to the use of connectives that link clauses with each other. In the narrow sense, asyndesis is the combination of clauses without connectives. In the wider sense, it is a coordinative or paratactic technique at any syntactic level between the combination of words into phrase and the combination of sentences into pieces of text (Leman 2006).

In summary, this section is concerned with syndetic parataxis which makes use of co-ordinators either additive or contrastive as well as asyndetic parataxis which makes less use of co-ordinators. The following sentences are examined under:

(A)   *Syndetic parataxis:*

1. *In the middle of the night he woke **and** could not tell where he was, in the middle of the night, groping around in nowhere no stars, no glow-worms that he could see, the other bank had held the course of rushing bright waters now they were turned black, black as the deep-sunk cauldrons of women dyers **and** the indigo streams from adire hung up to dry, dripping like blood in the oriki of Ogun, to to to to, **and** where were sloes on the bed of the river, **and** where were light-grains in the toe-grips of Olumo's ponderous nails. (P. 126).*

2. *For minutes Sagoe screwed his eyes **and** opened them out again weaving back and forth in sudden striking-snake motions, indifferent to Dehinwa's plaintive 'for heaven's sake, keep still!' some event powered his neck and he lunged finally at Egbo's face and remained there a mere foot away (p.18).*

3. *Voidancy remains the one true philosophy of the true Egoist, for definition, ladies and gentlemen, let this suffice, voidancy is not a movement of protest, but it protests it is non-revolutionary, but it revolts (p.71)*

(B)   *Asyndetic Parataxis*

4. *For Simi it was four walls, a radiogram, a rich carpet of Kurdish pile, not crumbling pine needles in the forestry reserves, beside thick columns of ants, beneath the whistle of the wind through cone-gathered pines and wet surmounted globules from rain-tree secreting brown golding gum crystals. (p.130)*

5. *Joe Golder bared his soul, mangled, spun in murky fountains of grief which cradled him, the long-lost child, but would not fling him clear….(.245).*

In sentence 1 there are a total of four additive conjunctions "and. All are used to connect clauses of equal weight. The first sentence is rather long and complex. Sentences such as this are used by the author to give the narrative its complex structure.

In page 246, the author writes: "**But** at times the bamboo broke **and** a child fell into the dye-pot **and** a huge out splash of dye flew out above the rims, **and** the child emerged shedding indigo tears, blackened to the eyeballs". This sentence begins with a contrastive conjunction which will have been more meaningful if one is to examine the sentence that preceded it. Apart from this contrastive conjunction the author makes use of three other additive conjunctions each of which is used to connect clauses of equal weights. From the sentences cited above and the one that follows one can say unequivocally that Soyinka uses paratactic

sentences with a view to giving the novel a very complex structure. The following expression can easily be broken into six different sentences:

"The blackness swallowed Joe Golder now before his eyes, and Egbo heard the shriek of the child's terror once again and the blackened hands to touch his and lips to meet his and clean waters to lave him and the waters did" (p.246).

"The blackness swallowed Joe Golder now before his eyes" (1)

"Egbo heard the shriek of the child's terror once again" (2)

"The blackened hands that flailed desperately for his hands to touch his" (3)

"Lips to meet his" (4)

"Clean waters to lave him" (5)

"The waters did" (6)

The author did not break the sentences down as shown above. Rather, he uses the additive conjunction "and" to join the main clauses so that they become one single complex structure.

In sentence 2, Soyinka makes use of the additive conjunction not only to join clauses but verbs and adjectives. For example, "…Sagoe screwed his eyes and opened them …Weaving back and forth…"

In sentence 3 one additive conjunction "and" is used to join two nouns that usually collocate "… ladies and gentlemen……" while the contrastive conjunctive "but" is used twice to link clauses of equal weight "voidancy is not a movement of protest, but it protests it is non-revolutionary, but it revolts" (p.71)

Two sentences are used to exemplify Soyinka's use of asyndetic parataxis. In sentence 4, a total of forty-seven words are used but only one conjunction is used. Instead the author relies heavily on the use of commas to separate the phrase; **"for simi it was four walls, a radiogram, a rich carpet of Kurdish pile, not crumbling pine needles in the forestry reserves** …" (p.130)

In the last sentence (5) the verbs are separated with commas. One contrastive conjunction is used: "Joe Golder bared his soul, mangled, spun in murky fountains of grief which cradled him the long-lost child, but would not fling him clear". The subject of the last clause becomes clear if one traces the entire narrative back to the implied pronoun--- "which". It is the implied subject of the clause and of course it has the phrase "… fountains of grief as its antecedent.

CONCLUSION

Diction is an aspect of style in literary studies which is primarily concerned with the writer's choice of words and manner of employing them. A writer may use simple words or compound words derived from other languages (such as Latin and Greek). He may coin his own words; or it may come from less common stock words (such as the languages of special

disciplines and occupations). In the vast majority of cases writers employ a predominance of everyday words. To do otherwise is to risk sounding quaint and tedious, and therefore being dismissed as irrelevant. The submission of Okonkwo (1990) which is in consonance with the postulation of this study is that the choice of words is greatly influenced by such considerations as the subject and setting of the narrative, the characters who are involved in the incident being presented, the type of audience to whom the work is primarily addressed, and the intentions of the novelist. This consideration also affects the syntactic structure which a writer employs in a particular narrative. This paper has specifically studied Soyinka's use of hypotactic sentence structure in the novel, *The interpreters*. The novel is inspired by the author's patron deity, Ogun. Some of the sentences made use of additive and contrastive coordinate conjunctions. Such are the paratactic sentence structures. Others are mainly appellations to the patron god. Such ones lack proper coordination and thus the narrative used only commas and semicolons and subordinating conjunctions. Such are the hypotactic sentence structures. In all it is noted that the novel made adequate combinations of varying sentence structures.

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